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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT

MARCH 21, 2011

SPEAKER: DONNA JAMES

GOOD AFTERNOON CLASS OF 2011!

I AM THRILLED TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE IN
THIS DAY WITH YOU!!

MY THANKS TO PRESIDENT GEE, THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES,
DISTINGUISHED FACULTY AND STAFF FOR THIS HONOR,

CONGRATULATIONS TO YOUR PARENTS, AND ALL OF YOUR
FAMILY, AND FRIENDS WHO SUPPORTED YOU ALONG THE
WAY!

I AM HAPPY TO HAVE MY FAMILY HERE SUPPORTING ME
TODAY AS WELL - MY MOTHER BERTHA, MY HUSBAND LARRY,
OUR SON CHRIS, AND HIS WIFE, TANYA, ALONG WITH
TWO OF OUR GRANDCHILDREN - TRINITY AND ELIJAH. I
WANTED THEM TO WITNESS THIS SPECTACULAR
CELEBRATION OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT.

I UNDERSTAND MY JOB IS TO PROVIDE YOU, OUR
GRADUATES WITH SOME WORDS OF WISDOM AND
INSPIRATION AS YOU COMPLETE THIS MILESTONE ON YOUR
LIFE'S JOURNEY.

THANK YOU FOR THIS VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN MY WISDOM,

BUT THIS IS ALSO A REMINDER THAT I AM NOT ONLY
GETTING WISER, BUT ALSO OLDER.... AND SAID ANOTHER
WAY....

"AGE IS A VERY HIGH PRICE TO PAY FOR MATURITY AND
WISDOM"

I THINK COMEDIAN GEORGE CARLIN, CAME UP WITH THIS
ONE LINER,

PERHAPS SOME OF YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHO GEORGE CARLIN
IS, SO JUST ASK YOUR PARENTS, THEY STILL KNOW A FEW
THINGS THAT PERHAPS YOU DON'T!

IN ANTICIPATION OF THIS DAY, I WAS INTERVIEWED BY A
JOURNALIST FOR THE LANTERN, AND SHE ASKED ME TWO
VERY GOOD QUESTIONS...

FIRST, HAD I EVER DONE THIS BEFORE - WHICH MADE ME
WONDER WHY PRESIDENT GEE DID NOT ASK ME THIS
QUESTION - FORTUNATELY I HAVE, SO I WILL STICK TO MY
TIME, BUT VERY LITTLE COMPARES TO GIVING THE
COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS FOR THE OHIO STATE
UNIVERSITY.

AND THEN SHE ASKED IF I REMEMBERED THE NAME OF THE
SPEAKER WHEN I GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE - WHICH I
COULD NOT.

AND WITH THAT I WAS SOMEWHAT COMFORTED BY THE
THOUGHT THAT IF I BLOW IT, YOU MAY NOT REMEMBER ME
EITHER!

IN THE PAPER YESTERDAY, THERE WAS A QUOTE FROM ONE OF OUR PHENOMENAL LADY BUCKS, JANTEL LAVENDAR WHO GRADUATES TODAY,

AND SHE IS QUOTED AS SAYING - "MY DEGREE IS FINISHED, THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS IS BASKETBALL"

AND SHE IS SO RIGHT, YOU ALL HAVE COMPLETED YOUR DEGREE, BUT EACH OF YOU STILL HAS UNFINISHED BUSINESS.

YOUR DEGREE AND THIS EDUCATION IS YOUR MEANS TO AN END.

AND AFTER YOU WALK ACROSS THIS STAGE, AND CELEBRATE THIS MOMENT WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY, YOU WILL GET BUSY WITH WHAT COMES NEXT IN YOUR LIFE.

YOU TAKE OFF YOUR GRADUATION CAP AND GOWN, AND
BEGIN A PROCESS OF PUTTING ON MANY NEW HATS BEFORE
YOU REACH MY AGE OR PERHAPS AT SOME TIME DOWN THE
ROAD, THIS SIDE OF THE PODIUM.

SINCE MY GRADUATION, I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO
WEAR A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT PROFESSIONAL, PERSONAL,
AND COMMUNITY HATS - A CPA, A HUMAN RESOURCE
EXECUTIVE, DIVISION PRESIDENT, CORPORATE DIRECTOR,
BUSINESS OWNER, EXECUTIVE COACH, FOUNDER OF A NON-
PROFIT, PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTEE, DAUGHTER, WIFE,
MOTHER, GRANDMOTHER....AND HOPEFULLY MORE TO COME....

BUT THERE ARE TWO PROFESSIONAL ROLES I ENJOY MOST.

FIRST, IS A PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT I ACCEPTED
OCTOBER OF LAST YEAR TO CHAIR THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S
BUSINESS COUNCIL. WE ARE ADVISORS TO THE PRESIDENT,
CONGRESS AND SBA ON DRIVING THE ECONOMIC GROWTH OF
WOMEN OWNED SMALL BUSINESS ACROSS THE NATION, A
CRITICAL LINK TO JOB GROWTH,

SO THIS WAS ONE UNEXPECTED OPPORTUNITY I WAS MORE
THAN WILLING TO SIGN UP FOR GIVEN THE IMPORTANCE OF
JOB CREATION!

AND THE SECOND ONE IS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF A
LEADERSHIP ACADEMY HERE IN COLUMBUS.

WE ENGAGE EMERGING LEADERS ACROSS THE BUSINESS AND NON-PROFIT COMMUNITY IN A PROGRAM TO BUILD THEIR CAPACITY FOR DOING WELL IN CAREER SO THEY CAN DO GOOD IN THE COMMUNITY.

AND OFTEN I AM ASKED THE QUESTION, - HOW DID YOU DO IT... WHAT WAS YOUR PATHWAY?

I SUSPECT SOME ARE LOOKING FOR THE MAGIC STRAIGHT SHOT UP THE CAREER LADDER - WHERE YOU FOLLOW THE BASIC RULES - SHOW UP EVERY DAY, WORK HARD, DELIVER RESULTS - AND THE ADVANCEMENT AND REWARD ARE AUTOMATIC.

THIS MINDSET IS A CARRYOVER OF OUR EDUCATIONAL
EXPERIENCE WHERE HARD WORK GETS THE LETTER GRADE
WHICH ASSURES ADVANCEMENT TO THE NEXT LEVEL -
AUTOMATIC ACCORDING TO THE RULES. -

NOT A VALUELESS PERSPECTIVE OR DISCIPLINE TO HAVE.
IT'S ONE WE HAVE FOLLOWED IN SCHOOL SINCE WE WERE 5
YEARS OLD.

BUT THE TRUTH IS - WHILE HARD WORK AND SHOWING UP
EVERY DAY IS REQUIRED,

AND IT MAY GET YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR, IT MAY NOT BE
SUFFICIENT FOR MOVING YOU FORWARD IN YOUR CAREER.

SOME OF YOU KNOW THIS ALREADY, AS YOU HAVE BEEN WORKING WHILE IN COLLEGE, AND POSITIONING FOR YOUR NEXT MOVE.

MY HUSBAND LARRY IS FOND OF SAYING EACH FRIDAY, THAT HE HAS ONLY TWO DAYS LEFT IN THE WORK WEEK! NOT THE TYPE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE YOU WANT TO ASPIRE TO ON A REGULAR BASIS, BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN HIS PERSPECTIVE AND DISCIPLINE ARE REQUIRED.

THE REALITY IS PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS ARE SIMILAR TO NEGOTIATING THE CRISS-CROSSED RUNGS OF A LATTICE - A FRAMEWORK OF OVERLAPING, UNFORESEEN, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES!

AND NAVIGATING A LATTICE REQUIRES BOTH PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL AGILITY AND A WILLINGNESS TO TAKE SOME RISKS.

AND SO AS MY WORDS OF WISDOM TO YOU FOR THIS DAY, I HAVE CHOSEN SEVERAL OF MY PERSONAL LESSONS IN AGILITY. THEY ARE MOST APPROPRIATE FOR YOU AS YOU START THIS PHASE OF YOUR JOURNEY ON THE LATTICE OF LIFE!

1. TAKE CARE OF FAMILY FIRST! - AND THIS INCLUDES TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF. IF WE WOULD FIND A WAY TO TO TAKE CARE OF OUR IMMEDIATE FAMILIES FIRST, THEIR MAY BE FEWER COMMUNITY FAMILIES IN NEED, OR AT LEAST THEY MIGHT NEED LESS, AND WHEN YOU TAKE CARE OF FAMILY, YOU ALSO TAKE CARE OF COMMUNITY.

2. CAREER PLANNING IS AN OXYMORON, BUT DO IT ANYWAY!

**- YOU WILL ALWAYS NEED A FRAMEWORK AND DIRECTION
FOR GETTING STARTED OR RESTARTED ON YOUR CAREER,
BUT KNOW THAT YOU CAN PLAN FOR THE UNEXPECTED.**

3. REMEMBER THAT COMPETENCE WITHOUT CONFIDENCE IS

**OPPORTUNITY LOST. AND CONFIDENCE WITHOUT
COMPETENCE IS AN ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN!**

4. BE COURAGEOUS AND TAKE SOME RISKS, IT'S ONLY WHEN

**YOU ARE OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE THAT YOU ARE IN
POSITION TO LEARN SOMETHING NEW**

5. STAY ON PURPOSE - THIS IS MYWAY OF SAYING...DON'T ALLOW ANGER, FEAR, JEALOUSY, GREED OR ANY NEGATIVE EMOTION DRIVE YOUR DECISIONS OR BEHAVIOR IN ANY GIVEN MOMENT.

6. PRAY OR BE STILL IN THE MOMENT - THERE WILL BE TIMES WHEN YOU ARE SO ANGRY OR DISAPPOINTED FOR EXAMPLE, THAT YOU REACT INSTEAD OF RESPONDING... DO THIS WHEN YOU CAN'T FIND THE RIGHT WORDS TO EXPRESS YOURSELF. OR PERHAPS YOU CAN FIND THE WORDS BUT YOU KNOW YOU WILL REGRET THEM LATER!!

7. BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU ASK FOR, BUT ALWAYS ASK, YOU JUST MIGHT GET IT!

8. CHOOSE WISELY YOUR LIFE PARTNER, AND YOUR PLAYMATES UNTIL THEN CAREFULLY! DO OVERS ARE

COSTLY AND PAINFUL, SO TRY TO GET IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME - MAKE A SHOPPING LIST OF WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR AND THEN MAKE SURE YOU HAVE EVERYTHING TO OFFER THAT'S ON YOUR LIST.

9. LEARN HOW TO BE A GOOD PARENT BEFORE YOU HAVE CHILDREN! AND EVEN IF YOU DON'T THINK YOU WANT CHILDREN! WE PROTEST EXPERIMENTING ON ANIMALS BUT WE GO INTO PARENTHOOD WITH NO FORMAL TRAINING AND EXPERIMENT ON OUR CHILDREN... TAKE A CLASS OR TWO, YOU WILL BE A BETTER PARENT AND A BETTER LEADER!

10. GET TO KNOW YOURSELF - AS WARREN BENNIS SAYS, "TO BECOME A LEADER YOU FIRST HAVE TO BECOME WHO YOU ARE"

11. DON'T BECOME BLINDED BY THE LIMITATIONS OTHERS
MAY SET FOR YOU

I HAVE ONE PERSONAL STORY ABOUT NAVIGATING THE
UNFORSEEN WHICH I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU.

ONE OF THE BEST AND MOST INTERESTING JOBS IN MY
CAREER, WAS A JOB THAT WHEN OFFERED, I DID NOT
WANT!

IT WAS NOT ON MY CAREER PLANNING RADAR AT ALL. PLUS
IT WAS A RISK, SINCE IT WAS OUTSIDE OF MY COMFORT
ZONE AT THE TIME.

AS I RECALL, YOU COULD HAVE KNOCKED ME OVER WITH A FEATHER WHEN THE CEO CALLED ME INTO HIS OFFICE AND SAID "DONNA, I'M AFRAID I'M GOING TO HAVE TO LET YOU GO"!

FOR A NANOSECOND I THOUGHT I WAS BEING FIRED, AND MY MIND RACED TO FIGURE OUT WHAT I HAD DONE.

THEN HE CONTINUED.... "I NEED YOU TO GO RUN HUMAN RESOURCES"

AND FOR ANOTHER NANOSECOND I WONDERED WHAT I HAD DONE TO DESERVE THIS ASSIGNMENT!

UNFORTUNATELY AT THE TIME HR HAD BECOME THE "GRAVE YARD" FOR BAD TALENT! (MY APOLOGIES TO MY FELLOW HR

COLLEAGUES, BUT AT THAT TIME IN OUR COMPANY IT HAD THE WORSE REPUTATION - BUT A VERY DIFFERENT STORY TODAY!).

I WAS AN OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE, A CPA, WITH TWO SECURITIES LICENSES! SO MY PLAN WAS TO GO BACK TO THE BUSINESS OPERATIONS AFTER MY 3-YEAR DEVELOPMENTAL ASSIGNMENT REPORTING TO THE CEO.

IT HAD BEEN A GREAT 3 YEARS. I LEARNED A LOT AND I WAS READY TO GO RUN A BUSINESS, NOT HR!

SO I GRACEFULLY TRIED TO DECLINE THE OPPORTUNITY, BUT HE QUICKLY ADDED.... "DONNA, THERE COMES A TIME IN EVERY EXECUTIVES CAREER WHEN THEY SERVE AT THE

PLEASURE OF THE CEO.... THIS IS ONE OF THOSE TIMES! I
NEED YOU TO GO DO THIS, TRUST ME!"

I RESPONDED... "WHEN DO I START"!

THANK GOD HE MADE ME TAKE THAT JOB!

IT POSITIONED ME FOR SO MUCH MORE THAN I EVER COULD
HAVE IMAGINED .

AND I MOVED ON FROM THIS ROLE TO EVENTUALLY BECOME
PRESIDENT OF A BUSINESS DIVISION, USING A LOT OF
WHAT I LEARNED FROM THE JOB I DID NOT WANT,

THERE IS A SAYING THAT WHEN LIFE THROWS YOU LEMONS
MAKE LEMONADE, BUT THIS WAS NO LEMON, IT WAS A
DIAMOND OPPORTUNITY IN THE ROUGH!

THESE ARE MY FINAL WORDS OF WISDOM, SO TRY TO
REMEMBER AT LEAST SOME OF THEM, EVEN IF YOU FORGET
YOUR COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER AS I HAVE DONE.

BE WELL CLASS OF 2011, AND GO BUCKS!

THANK-YOU!